

1880

[For Private Circulation.]

REPORT OF AID

GIVEN TO

Destitute Mothers and Infants.

We testify to the need of this charity, and believe that the money given to it will be faithfully and judiciously expended.

W. L. RICHARDSON, M. D.,
Physician of Boston Lying-In Hospital.

CHARLES P. PUTNAM, M. D.
Physician of Mass. Infant Asylum.

MARY A. SMITH, M. D.,
Resident Physician N. E. Hospital for Women and Children.

REPORT.

The object of this charity is, —

1. To give a short convalescence to any mother discharged with a young infant from a maternity hospital, no longer requiring medical care, but not yet able to work, and without means to procure the two or three weeks' rest so much needed at this period; also, occasionally, previous to the admission of applicants to these hospitals, to pay their board for a week or two, in case they are without a home, friendless, and penniless.

2. To find good boarding-places for those infants whose mothers are engaged in domestic service, or earning their living in any way which prevents their retaining the infants under their personal care, and to visit children so placed, in order to be sure that they have the attention which they require. Occasionally, also, a mother who lives in her own home receives temporary assistance.

3. Especially to watch over and befriend those unmarried mothers, who, not yet depraved, are in danger of falling into evil from their peculiarly exposed and friendless condition. A large proportion of these are girls under twenty years of age.

It should be remembered that our charity does not include the depraved and hardened. The desire to retain the charge of her child, and the willingness to do her utmost for its support, is made the condition of helping an unmarried mother. If any one applies for aid, expecting to be relieved from the burden of supporting her child, she is refused. Those who receive assistance are helped just so far as they are actually unable to earn what is necessary themselves. In a number of cases, the mother pays all her earnings for her child's board; and we provide her with such

clothing as is necessary for health and comfort, and which we can purchase at a more economical rate than she.

Our work, therefore, resolves itself into, —

1st. The careful investigation of cases that present themselves.

2d. The selection of good boarding-places for infants, and the constant supervision of infants placed at board.

3d. A friendly and judicious care for the welfare of the younger and more helpless mothers.

As our charity becomes more known each year, we undergo the usual experience of those who work for similar objects ; we receive a larger number of applications without a corresponding increase of means. A very large number are necessarily refused. In selecting those we assist, we are governed chiefly by these considerations : —

1st. The love of the mother for her infant, and corresponding desire to support it and retain it in her care.

2d. The urgent necessity and danger of those young unmarried girls who are without friends who can assist them. This class are usually orphans.

3d. The temporary poverty which is the occasional misfortune of some respectable married women, who often need only a little help for two or three weeks until tided over this period.

On the other hand, we refuse, —

1st. Those who are actually depraved.

2d. Those who regard the care of their infants as a burden from which they wish to be relieved.

3d. Those who, having earned good wages for a considerable time previous to the application, have neglected the opportunity to save money, and thus have less claim than others to receive charity.

4th. Those who have relatives able to assist them.

5th. Those who appear to be permanent paupers (a certain class of women familiar to workers in all charities).

The help given to these mothers is, in many cases, temporary. After two or three weeks' rest, a capable and healthy woman can often find work, by which she may support herself and her infant entirely. Some few obtain good places as wet nurses. These, of course, are exceptionally fortunate. Others can earn enough to support themselves and their infants almost entirely. These need occasional gifts of clothing, car-fares, etc. The help thus bestowed may amount to but very little, estimated in money; but it may make the difference to the mother of keeping her child, giving it up for adoption, or letting it board in some cheap and poor boarding-place, where the poor little thing gradually fails and dies for want of the much-needed motherly care.

A few need a great deal of care, a great deal of time, and — in proportion to those already mentioned — a great deal of money. When a woman is unskilled in any kind of remunerative labor, or suffers from ill-health, or labors under both these disqualifications, the struggle to earn her child's living is a very hard one; and yet her warm affection for her child, and earnest desire to retain the charge of it, merit assistance. And the result of helping this class of mothers is, sometimes, especially satisfactory and encouraging.

The influence that may be exercised over the minds of one class of women by a judicious and sympathizing friend, will be better understood by those who realize the peculiarly forlorn condition of a young unmarried mother, on leaving the hospital with a young infant in her arms; homeless, friendless, ignorant, frightened, probably still weak in health; fearing all the sufferings to which she is exposed from poverty and inexperience, though ignorant, perhaps, of the still greater dangers that beset her path. If, at this moment of extreme peril and suffering, a friendly hand is held out to her, the gratitude that she feels is something that those who are brought up in a sheltered home, surrounded by love and tenderness, can hardly understand. If, on the other hand, she meets with no friendship at this time from those whose influence will be used to help her to lead a virtuous life, she will be only too readily received by those who would lead her still farther astray.

Having no official authority, it is necessary to act with great tact and sympathy in the somewhat difficult relation of friendly adviser toward a young woman whose circumstances may render her peculiarly sensitive, and who has grown up under unfavorable influences. The most touching gratitude shown by these poor young mothers, for what seem to us very small kindnesses, is a painful evidence of the coldness and harsh atmosphere with which they have been previously surrounded. With those who are *unused* to receive kindness, a small crumb is prized, and this more than compensates for the absence of authority. The difficulty, in some cases, is of course the uselessness of any appeal to an undeveloped reason and conscience. But, where the reason and conscience are still too feeble to be used as guides, we have the resource of appealing to the affections. The love of the mother for her child is, in many cases, very strong; in others it is feebler; but after a very few weeks, during which the mother has kept the child with her and given it her personal care, it ripens into a very real feeling. And this love for the child, and the care and responsibility for its support, prove a wonderful educational influence. In no other way could the mother's higher nature be so developed. It is most interesting to watch the change that this experience produces. In some cases, the expression of a face has been wholly changed in the course of a few months, gaining character and earnestness in the place of a somewhat vacant and childish expression.

Difficulties and Obstacles.—One of our difficulties lies in the lack of suitable places where those women who are homeless may work for their board, previous to their admission to one of the maternity hospitals. It is very undesirable to board a woman longer than a week or two at this period; partly on account of the great expense thus incurred, but chiefly from the injury, both moral and physical, to the patient from the effect of idleness. The family who are able to give a home to a woman during this period accomplishes more for her benefit than a large sum of money could procure.

Another and a similar need is that of places where our patients may be received and retain their infants with them. It is, of course, only a capable woman who can be of use enough to make it worth while to receive her infant also. Such a woman, however, we occasionally meet, and such a home is sometimes found. And when we have made an arrangement of this kind, it usually proves very satisfactory to the employer.

One obstacle we frequently encounter, in the well-intended efforts of the employers of our mothers, who, without informing themselves of the difficulty of obtaining a place for an infant in a charitable institution, urge upon the mother that her best course is to give her child up for adoption, and, having argued the mother into regarding the care of her child as a burden to be cast aside, rather than a responsibility to be met, they discover that the child, perhaps delicate in health and not very attractive, is not suitable for adoption; or that any institution that would give it good care is too full to receive it; or that the mother is, on the whole, better able to support it than three quarters of those who apply for help from charity. The result is to render the mother discontented and unhappy, and eager to free herself from a care which is a source of privation and discomfort. This can always be done if the child's advantage is not considered; for it may, as before stated, be placed where it will not receive good care, either in an already over-crowded institution, or in a cheap and poor boarding-place, and its death will soon follow.

It may be worth while to allude here to some experiences we have had in dealing with those who appear to be not thoroughly informed on these subjects, but who have come in contact with some individual case which calls forth their sympathies. We receive most urgent applications for aid, and on investigation find that the object for whom the charity is intended is already much better off than those whom we are assisting. The kind-hearted friend who applies cannot understand that her case should be refused; although the woman earns already enough for her own support and her child's, and something over, and perhaps has friends able to help her, if she will apply to them. It is in vain

to explain that others are poorer, are in ill-health, are out of work, are earning only a dollar a week, are working for board only; or, if married, are struggling with the care of several little children. Should we take money from these in order that another may have a superfluity? We are still met by urgent entreaties that this one, at least, may be assisted. And sometimes a refusal is received with some displeasure and indignation.

On the other hand, we find ourselves seriously accused of "encouraging vice" by giving any assistance whatever to an unmarried mother. "Let her suffer the consequences of her sin," is the cry. The consequences are inevitable, and they are often very bitter; but is it not encouraging vice to leave a weak, helpless young girl in a situation where every temptation to sink lower is greatly increased, and the power to withstand inevitably diminished?

Another objection is sometimes brought against our work. It is said that, while we regard the welfare of the mother in thus using the child for her moral education, we ignore the disadvantage to the child, who might, if taken from the mother, be placed under more favorable circumstances.

We may answer to this, —

1st. A large number of the infants of unmarried mothers are not eligible for adoption during the first few weeks or months of their life; the circumstances of birth and parentage combining to render the child pining, fretful, and unattractive.*

2d. A small number are decidedly feeble and sickly, and thus debarred from any good chance of adoption.

3d. Boys, at the age of a few weeks or months, are always very difficult to have adopted.

4th. The child's own mother is often so warmly attached to it, that to urge a separation would be an unauthorized interference with the maternal instinct.

* One of the pleasantest features of our work is the rapid improvement of these infants. Under favorable circumstances, a few months — sometimes even a few weeks — of good care and wholesome food bring about a great change, and transform a pallid and nervously sensitive infant into a healthy and lovely child.

In view of these conditions, it would seem that the simple, natural, wholesome method is for each mother to make an *effort* for the child's support, and that she should receive help just so far as she is unable to do what is needed for herself. Each case is then regarded as individual, and receives the care and advice that its peculiar circumstances require.

We are able to carry out this idea' (of treating each case according to its peculiar needs), since we have no official organization, and are therefore able to work as private individuals. We thus follow principles rather than rules, and can decide questions according to the exigencies of the case, instead of being obliged to wait for the action of boards or committees. It may be well to mention that the chief part of our work is done by a very few ladies, who give the larger part of their time to it, and who have now the advantage of six or seven years' experience. And, feeling that we have learned something during these years in regard to these important and perplexing questions, and grateful for the measure of success that has been granted to our work in the past, we look forward to the future with renewed hope, and a desire to fulfil more earnestly, wisely, and faithfully our duty toward these suffering ones, who stand in so much need of judicious aid and friendly sympathy.

MRS. JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

MRS. ELLA J. BRADLEY.

MARY R. PARKMAN.

LILIAN CLARKE.

APRIL 1, 1881.

Subscriptions may be sent to Mrs. James Freeman Clarke, Jamaica Plain, Mass.; or to Dr. C. P. Putnam, 63 Marlborough Street, Boston.

RECEIVED DURING 1880.

Ames, Miss Helen A.....	\$50.00	May, Mrs. S., Boston.....	\$10 00
Blake, Mrs. Geo. Baty.....	15.00	May, Miss A. W.....	5.00
Blake, Mrs. S. P.....	3.00	Minot, Dr. F.....	10.00
Bradley, Mrs. Wm.....	2.00	Minot, Miss Mary.....	5.00
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Higginson, Mrs. Waldo	10.00	"A Friend," by Geo. Higgin- son.....	100.00
Holmes, Mrs. O. W.....	5.00	Repaid by persons assisted...	8.50
Hooper, Mrs. S.....	200.00	Interest on United States Bond (gift of Mrs. Wm. B. Greene)	60.00
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Lamb, Miss Rose.....	10.00		
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Lowell, Miss Anna C.....	100.00		
Lyman, Theodore.....	25.00		
			\$2,258.50
		Balance due Treasurer..	10.14
			<hr/> \$2,268.64

Miss Hannah Smith, clothing for women and infants.

Mrs. C. A. Bartol, clothing for infants.

Mrs. W. C. Houston, clothing for infants.

Miss E. G. Huidekoper, clothing for infants.

Miss Jane Barber, clothing for infants.

Mrs. E. C. Clarke, clothing for infants.

Church of Disciples, Industrial Aid Society, clothing for women and infants.

Co-operative Society, Chardon St., by Mrs. James T. Fields, a large quantity of clothing for women and infants.

EXPENDED DURING 1880.

Overdrawn last year's account	\$3.01	Medicine.....	\$70.74
Board of women.....	455.87	Advertisements.....	17.00
Board of infants.....	640.46	Printing Report, &c.....	27.37
Clothing for women.....	151.55	Sundries.....	134.52
Clothing for infants.....	171.22	Salary of assistant.....	156.00
Fares and travelling.....	244.77		
Food and milk for infants....	196.13		<hr/>
			\$2,268.64

ASSISTED DURING 1880.

Whole number assisted.....	98	AGES OF UNMARRIED WOMEN. (New cases.)	
		14 years old.....	1
		15 " ".....	1
		16 " ".....	4
Old cases (continued from 1879)...	35	18 " ".....	6
New cases (taken in 1880).....	63	19 " ".....	2
	<hr/>	20 " ".....	6
	98	21 " ".....	5
		22 " ".....	4
		23 " ".....	5
		24 " ".....	4
		25 " ".....	4
		26 " ".....	2
Married women (new cases).....	18	Unknown.....	1
Unmarried " (" ").....	45		<hr/>
	63		45
		NATIONALITY OF UNMARRIED WOMEN. (New cases.)	
NATIONALITY OF MARRIED WOMEN.		American.....	11
(New cases.)		Irish-American.....	13
		Irish.....	5
		Nova-Scotian.....	6
		British Provinces.....	3
		English.....	2
		German.....	2
		Swedish.....	1
		Scotch-American.....	1
		Unknown.....	1
			<hr/>
			45

